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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000631

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TAGS: PGOV KDEM KPKO MOPS CG
SUBJECT: ITURI UPDATE: NEW ANTI-MILITIA CAMPAIGN IMMINENT
REF: KINSHASA 359

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary: MONUC and the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) are making final preparations for a new anti-militia campaign in Ituri District. While no date for the operation has been set, MONUC commanders believe fighting will begin soon. Meanwhile, militia forces of the Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC) continue to recruit demobilized ex-combatants into their ranks. The MRC has also increased the frequency of its attacks on FARDC positions throughout the province, most recently in Bule and Nioka. End summary.

ITURI EXPLORER NEARLY READY TO BEGIN

¶2. (C) MONUC and the FARDC are finalizing plans for a new military campaign against militia elements of the Patriotic Forces of Resistance in Ituri (FRPI). According to MONUC's Eastern Division Operations Chief, Lt. Col. Johann Heyns, the imminent campaign -- code named Operation Ituri Explorer -- is intended to recapture the village of Tcheli in southern Ituri District. Tcheli fell to FRPI militias in March after elements of the FARDC mutinied in the course of battle (reftel). Heyns could not say when the operation would commence, but told PolOff April 20 that MONUC and FARDC commanders on April 19 met to finalize operational plans.

¶3. (C) Heyns said in addition to the MONUC resources to be deployed during Ituri Explorer, MONUC troops in North Kivu may be requested to secure the border with Ituri. Heyns said this deployment would attempt to prevent the flight of militias southward into North Kivu province. The additional troops could also prevent the flow of arms to the Ituri militias from North Kivu, which MONUC reports has been increasing in recent weeks.

¶4. (C) MONUC sources report that FARDC troops from the 811th Brigade have finished their training under the guidance of MONUC peacekeepers. These FARDC soldiers were sent from North Kivu province to provide reinforcement for the FARDC in advance of the next phase of anti-militia operations.

MILITIAS STILL RECRUITING AND ATTACKING

¶5. (C) According to a MONUC Eastern Division April 19 situation report, the MRC continues to recruit militia members throughout Ituri, and that MRC members met in Bunia April 18 to collect money for the recruitment of demobilized ex-combatants. MONUC also has reports that militia leader

Mathieu Ngudjolo of the Ituri Nationalist Front (FNI) is believed to be recruiting for the MRC (in the form of small cash payments) in the locations of Lirpi, Zumbe, Zekere and Loga (locations both north and south of Bunia). MONUC military observers report that militia numbers have been increasing, due most likely to these monetary incentives.

¶6. (C) Meanwhile, MRC militias continue their attacks on FARDC positions. On April 18, the FARDC position at Bule was attacked by MRC forces. After FARDC troops in Bule fled to Fataki during the attack, two battalions of MONUC Nepalese peacekeepers (based in Mahagi), in addition to approximately 40 FARDC troops, subsequently launched a counterattack against the militia. FARDC-MONUC troops retook Bule and stabilized the situation on the evening of April 18. The militia reportedly fled to a large forest hideout in the Dhera area. Two militia members were captured during the operation, and one was reported killed. One FARDC officer was reportedly killed in the fighting. FARDC forces came under attack April 18 at Nioka, but held their ground during the firefight. MONUC reports three militia members and one FARDC sergeant were killed in the fighting.

COMMENT: DIFFICULT FIGHT AHEAD

¶7. (C) After seven weeks with no sustained offensive against the militia, MONUC and FARDC forces will face a tough fight against the Ituri militias, who have been regrouping and rearming since the beginning of March. In addition, the FRPI and the MRC will be anticipating any military action. It is not clear how capable and dedicated FARDC forces will be in

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combat following a disastrous campaign in Tchei, but the newly-trained FARDC troops of the 811th Brigade should provide a much-needed boost to the Congolese Army in its fight against the militias.

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